

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, May 31, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FLOWER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture. Publication offered: "Dahlias for the Home," Farmers' Bulletin No. 1370.

--ooOoo--

Questions about flowers fill up this week's mailbag--questions from gardeners who are growing flowers and other listeners who just happen to be interested in flowers.

Now, for example, here are several inquiries about cut flowers. One letter says: "Will you tell me which flowers are best for cutting--that is, which ones generally keep longest in water?"

Answer: You can usually count on daisies, asters, verbenas, iris, lilies, carnations, chrysanthemums, calendulas and such spring flowers as daffodils and tulips to keep best of all the flowers. With the right care they will stay fresh a week or even longer. Chrysanthemums may last two weeks if kept cool. Some flowers will last from one to four days longer in the house if you let them float or stand in a deep jar of water for about 6 hours before arranging them. The flowers that always need a "float" are violets, forget-me-nots, pansies, heliotrope and cyclamen. Many of the common garden annuals such as hollyhocks, poppies and cosmos do not keep well as cut flowers so may better be enjoyed in the garden than used for indoor decoration.

Another question that often comes up during the summer is about using aspirin or copper for keeping flowers longer. Writes another listener: "Is it true that aspirin in the water will keep cut flowers fresh? And is it true that flowers stay fresh longer in copper bowls or vases?"

Answer: Plant scientists at the Department of Agriculture have never found that aspirin helped in keeping flowers fresh. The only possible way it could help would be in keeping down the bacteria that cause the flower stems to decay and close up the tubes that carry water up to the blossoms, but such aid would be very slight at the most. As for copper containers, here again they may help simply by keeping down bacteria in the water.

The best way to keep flowers fresh is to see that they get all the water they need. First of all, cut them in the early morning before the sun is hot when the plants have had all night to drink in moisture. If possible, carry a pail of cold water to the garden with you and as you cut, put the stems immediately in the water so they won't have time to dry out and wilt. Then be sure you cut the flowers properly. Breaking flowers off may crush and injure the stems. A dull knife or shears may do the same thing with soft stems. But a sharp knife makes a clean cut that will not close up the water tubes in the stem.

(more)

10-11-12

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

10

5/31/38

Cut most stems with a slanting upward slice to expose as much of the tubes as possible. But woody stems should be split two ways for a couple of inches--again, to open the tubes. The chrysanthemum stem is an exception to the cutting rule. It should be mashed before you place it in cold water.

As I said, many flowers will profit by a float of several hours before you arrange them in vases. All flowers that are even slightly wilted should have this treatment. Immerse them in cold water right "up to their necks," so to speak--right up to the bloom. And remember that even freshly cut flowers will last longer if they have their float in a dark cold place.

Changing the water and clipping the stems of the flowers every day--clipping them under water is also a great help in keeping flowers fresh. Bacteria in the water soon cause the cut end of the stem to clog up. By cutting this end off every day, the tubes in the stem stay open. If the flowers stand in a warm room during the day, they will appreciate a float in a cool room every night--or even spending the night covered with waxed paper in the refrigerator. By the way, all leaves that come below the water line when the flowers are arranged may well be removed because this foliage will add to the spoilage in the water.

Now here's a letter from a gardener who wants to know when to plant dahlias. She asks not only when to plant but a whole page of other questions about growing dahlias. So I am mailing her at once a bulletin which should answer all her questions. I am sending her the bulletin called "Dahlias for the Home." It is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1370. And like all other Farmers' bulletins, it is free for the asking from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.--free as long as the supply lasts. Once again, gardeners, if you want information on dahlias, remember the bulletin "Dahlias for the Home," No. 1370 -- Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

But to go back to the question about when to plant. Our garden adviser says early dahlias can be planted as soon as all danger of frost is past, but the main dahlia garden is planted a week or two later. Dahlias want warm days and cool nights to bloom best so they don't do well if they come on in mid-summer when nights are hot.

Experts often grow dahlias from seed and from cuttings, but most amateurs have better results by growing from roots. Those roots you keep stored in boxes of sand in the cellar during the winter. Then before they sprout you can take them out and separate them so that you have one good bud developing to each root or cluster of roots. Place the root, bud end up, in a 6 or 7 inch pot or in a box of fine soil so it will form feeding rootlets and throw up a strong vigorous stem. Keep the roots well watered and then after a couple of weeks, set the plants out in fine rich, well-prepared ground. Lay off the rows for dahlias about 4 feet apart and put the plants 3 feet apart.

More questions next week on Tuesday.

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100

100